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SUBJECT: IRAQI PUBLIC BROADCASTING BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS ON
NEW BOARD APPOINTED BY PM WITHOUT PARLIAMENTARY APPROVAL

REF: 06 BAGHDAD 01560

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT GILCHRIST, FOR REASONS
1.4 (B,D).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: In mid-March, Fadel Jalal Mohammed, a member of the Iraqi Media Network (IMN) board, which oversees public service broadcasting in Iraq, confirmed to PolOffs that PM Maliki failed to seek Council of Representative's (CoR) approval when he fired the former IMN board and installed a new board in February. Mohammed acknowledged that the PM's firing of the former board counters the stipulations of CPA Order 66, which governs Iraq's public service broadcasting. He also provided details on the sectarian make-up of the new board, which by CPA order should reflect fairly and equitably, the political diversity of Iraq and its people. END SUMMARY.

MALIKI FIRED IMN BOARD WITHOUT COR APPROVAL

¶12. (C) Fadel Jalal Mohammed acknowledged to PolOffs on March 12 that when PM Maliki fired all the members of the former IMN board in February, except for him and chair Abdulhaleem Al-Rahemi, he did so without CoR's approval. (Note: Per CPA Order 66, the IMN board can only be dismissed by a two-thirds vote by CoR. End Note.) Mohammed said PM Maliki had indicated to him that he replaced the IMN board because he was dissatisfied with its inaction. Mohammed added that in seeking the new board, Maliki asked Al-Rahemi to provide him a list of 20 to 30 candidates, and PM Maliki chose the six new board-members (out a total of eight) from the list. According to Mohammed, the board will remain in place until the CoR approves another new board; however, he said he anticipates that PM Maliki will nominate at least six of the current IMN board members to CoR.

MEMBERS OF THE NEW IMN BOARD

¶13. (C) Mohammed provided the following details on the political, religious, professional, and national backgrounds of the eight-member IMN board, which consists of one secular, two Kurdish, one Sunni, and four Shiite members. (Note: The IMN board's sectarian balance is important as it impacts perceptions of whether the board supports fair and diverse public broadcasting. End Note.) The current members of the board are as follows:

-- Abdulhaleem Ahmed Jewad Al-Rahemi: Board Chair. Secular, with over thirty years of media-related experience. He is a British citizen.

-- Fadel Jalal Mohammed: A Kurd with a background in economics and management. He is a Swedish citizen.

-- Hadi Hasan Talib: A Shiite, who previously worked in the Dawa Information Section in Europe and Teheran. He is close to PM Maliki, speaks good English, and is a British citizen.

-- Abbass Jabbar Mohammed Al-Yassiry: A Shiite, who is a media person and is close to Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) leader Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim.

-- Ali Hamedi Mutleq Al-Ausi: A Shiite, who previously worked for Dawa media. He is a Swedish citizen.

-- Amir Majeed Khedair Al-Qaisi: A Sunni, who used to be a communist. He has a background as a journalist working at Baghdad's independent, Al-Mada newspaper.

-- Hameed Jasim Mossa Al-Mukar: A Shiite, with close ties to Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) leader Moqtada al-Sadr. He is a poet and writer, affiliated with the International PEN Club.

-- Abbass Bager Khadem Al-Baderi: A Kurd, who has been a journalist, since the early 1960s.

MALIKI WILLING TO CONSIDER FEMALE MEMBER

¶4. (C) Mohammed said when the new IMN board-members met with PM Maliki in late February to discuss CPA Order 66, they suggested including a ninth, female member. (Note: CPA Order 66 calls for nine BOG members, including the chair. End Note.) According to Mohammed, PM Maliki said, "Give me some names". Mohammed said he thinks a female Sunni would be an

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optimal board-member, because it would improve both the board's gender and sectarian balance, which is important since the board makes its decisions through majority votes. Mohammed added that he hopes PM Maliki would accept a Sunni candidate and he has already some names in mind.

BOARD TO STUDY AL-IRAQIYYA'S BIAS

¶5. (C) Mohammed said that the new IMN board met with its Director General Habib al-Sadr on March 11 and 12 to discuss the board's role within the IMN and formed a subcommittee to study "mistakes" that Al-Iraqiyya -- Iraq's largest news station and public broadcaster operated by the IMN -- has made during the last two years. He acknowledged that Al-Iraqiyya's coverage had been biased by, for example, giving live airtime to Shiite celebrations, while excluding similar coverage for other sects (reftel).

COMMENT

¶6. (C) PM Maliki's firing of the former IMN board and installment of the new board clearly flouted CPA Order 66's stipulation that only the CoR can vote to dismiss IMN board-members before the end of their terms. It is notable that there has been no apparent protest by CoR against the PM's decision. On the other hand, PM Maliki's willingness to consider a female IMN board-member and the board's new study on Al-Iraqiyya's biased coverage may support independent media development goals. Post will stay engaged on helping IMN achieve neutrality per CPA Order 66. END COMMENT.
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